

Year B Ordinary 4

1 Corinthian 8. 1-13

Care in the Christian Community

1 Corinthians 8.9 Be careful not to let your freedom of action make those who are weak in faith fall into sin.

One of the greatest pastoral heart-aches is to see people lost from Christian fellowship because of the actions of others in the Christian community.

Most will have experienced this and have stories to tell

Paul, like his Master, was concerned first with the whole community which made up the body of Christ - the Church - and could not endure division and discord among Christ's people.

Here in Corinth it was the question of eating meat which endangered the fellowship and he had to express his concern about it in words and by example.

Most meat for sale in the markets had first been offered to idols in the one of the numerous temples. Social and business relationships in which some Christians were involved would involve meals.

Christians sure in their faith would eat meat having no fear of the powers of pagan gods, but weaker, more recent converts, not strong in their faith would be challenged by their example. Memories of their previous religious allegiance could be attractive and create mental and spiritual conflict for them

Therefore, Paul says what matters most in Christian Community is **the care of the weakest members**

That may be young people, or new converts of all ages.

In our Christian communities ..

Not all are strong in their faith

able to say with assurance *-I KNOW!*

Many live with constant attraction to former ways

- to a life-style which does not honour Christ - with constant temptation

- giving opposition to their faith and witness

My freedom to live without compromising my Christian principles, which is the product of mature faith, may create subtle temptations for someone weaker in faith.

Caring in the Christian Community

In the light of this

Caring in the Christian Community means:

Love for the whole fellowship - all ages - all levels of maturing faith
which involves

awareness of the difficulties of the weaker members

and being unwilling to hurt another for whom Christ died

sacrifice - foregoing our freedom for the sake of others;

It is all about loving and prayerful thought by each member for all the members

Year B Ordinary 5

Mark 1: 29 - 39

Others

Mark 1.38 We must go on...that's why I came!

What's it all about ?

Youngsters outside church before service time, asked, 'What do you do in there?' An invitation to come and see was accepted, but they did not stay long.

We do not always appreciate how strange Christian practice and worship may seem to a generation which has grown up with no knowledge of it.

They are not necessarily *anti-church*.

Many have a real awareness of a spiritual aspect to life ...
and their questions can be challenging

Some most invigorating times in ministry have been when a new convert has asked basic questions - why read the Bible ? how do you pray ? - why is the table so important.... how do you visualise God ???

It is good to share the youngster's question - what do you do in there ?
What are we really here for - what is it all about?.

The Basics of Church Life

What is the church for ?

The simplest answer - we call the church the body of Christ

- it is the company of his people who live in the community
- through whom together Jesus fulfils his Kingdom ministry

Many Christians and churches - see their work for Christ in these terms

- not overtly or aggressively evangelistic*
- just living in the community as representing Jesus and his Way of life*

Jesus himself gave us a pattern of that work in Mark 1 It could be described as:

A day in the life of Christ

It was in Capernaum

- where Jesus made his home and base for his ministry in Galilee
- a bustling political and commercial centre where his family had connections
- and from where some of his first disciples came.

The day in question was a Sabbath

It began with worship, teaching and preaching in the synagogue

He preached with power and people recognised a new note of authority about his words
- divine authority - he spoke for God

They had other glimpses of that authority as Jesus released a man from his mental and spiritual chains (or possession)

After the synagogue there is a homely picture of fellowship and a meal together in the home of Simon Peter - where Simon's mother-in-law is healed from a fever.

The Sabbath ends with crowds thronging the house yard
People with all the desperate needs imaginable
- blind - lame - possessed: - anxious – mentally troubled ..
- all wanting and finding healing, freedom and peace
and finding it in the words, touch and presence of Jesus

Finally, Mark concludes the day with Jesus at prayer before daybreak

That day in the life is a picture of the work of the Church
- Jesus' body here today
- worshipping
- preaching the word of God
- teaching the way of the Kingdom
- healing, helping, setting people free from themselves and the clutches of evil
- and all steeped in prayer

A central motive and a surprise

While Jesus is at prayer his followers are eager to be at work
The Kingdom is happening
Let's get busy - the crowds are already coming from all over
- they're waiting for you - let's go! Let's have another great day!
And then, to their surprise - Jesus said 'No. We're moving on'
There are others!

It was the beginning of a wider vision of the Kingdom and of their ministry
Jesus made it clear that in all he was accomplishing
His one aim was God's will - to love the whole world
to establish a world-wide Kingdom
to be continually reaching OTHERS to *share the love of God with them*

It is that cosmic dimension which inspires all Jesus' praying, healing, teaching, preaching

Why are we here ? What are we doing ?
We are building the Kingdom of God **in the world!**

Like the meal table
We sit down and enjoy good food and feel very satisfied - but rarely ask why?
What's the real purpose?
Not simply pleasure. But to live - to gain the strength to live and work

So with our Christian life. Our work as the church.
It is not just for personal satisfaction - to find comfort - our own assurance of salvation
- peace with God
- but to save the world - it is for OTHERS !

*Even in recession I am amazed at the astounding costs of advertising - millions of pounds and hours of time are spent by companies who have a vision of
the markets they are missing - the others!*

Our inspiration for our life together in Christ Jesus

For being his church

has to be **the ones who are missing**

Jesus said, There are other sheep - I must bring them as well

And he prayed - I want my disciples - my people to be completely one so that the world will believe - may know that you sent me - and that you loved them as you love me.

Paul took up the same theme

He was always moving on - the world - the empire for Christ

And our last record of him is him wanting to be out of prison and moving on to Spain

The same motive lies behind the great mission movements - OTHERS

- Christians moving out - praying - giving - longing

in obedience to the word and vision of Christ Jesus

Recovering the vision

We may recover the universal vision

by prayer

as Jesus made clear in word and practice

by opening life to the Holy Spirit

by sharing the life and love of Jesus - till consumed by

his compassion - by his costly, all sacrificing love

his longing to speak, to tell, to teach, to heal, to bring release and healing

Jesus promised - that his Holy Spirit is the Father's gift to all who ask.

What's it all for ? OTHERS !

The young man asked - *what do you do in there?*

The answer should have been

*We think about God and we think about **you!***

That's what it's all for!

Year B 1 before Lent

Mark 9: 2 - 9

Climb This Mountain

Mark 9:2 Jesus took Peter, James and John and led them up a high mountain.

The best view

I have no great desire to climb Everest, but I do enjoy walking on high places, being among the mountains

Those who climb high get the best views (on a clear day!) and the clearest sounds
That is also true of spiritual life

- those who get closer to God see more of his glory
- hear and understand more of his heart and mind
- get a different, love-view of the world

It was the experience of three disciples of Jesus
Over-awed by the dazzling whiteness of the glory of Christ
they realised that in this man, this friend, this teacher they had been on a spiritual 'high'
- they had been as close to God as Moses and Elijah had been

Indelible Experience

What happened in this experience was bigger than any words

It left an indelible impression

- so much so that Peter was writing about it many years later

"We were there on the mountain when he was given honour and glory by God the Father, when the voice came to him from the Supreme Glory..." (2 Peter)

Remembering the event, Peter explains that
this is the source of his faithful living for Jesus
this is the motive for mission and evangelism
this is the root of his life-long confidence in God and Jesus his Son
this is the basis of his hope for all eternity
- THE VISION OF CHRIST'S GLORY

The greatest moments and advances of Christ's people have come when people have been fired with the vision of divine glory - the wonder of God in Jesus Christ

It follows that our priority in all aspects of worship, mission and service is that same sense of his glory. NOT FIRST, more services - more activities - better music - new expressions

BUT a new vision of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ

Aspects of Glory

Peter claims there are three aspects of the glory experience
(Accepting that Peter's stamp is on Mark's Gospel account)

What then did this really mean for Peter, that it became so important to him - this experience of Transfiguration?

What was it that he learned and felt that enabled him to find strength to continue with Christ through suffering and hardship - spiritually and physically?

His impressions may be summed up in three words

Purity Eternity Divinity

Purity

Against the background of Hermon's snow - they saw his glory - WHITER than WHITE

The radiance was indicative of his pure life

a human life - tempted as we are, but without sin

On the mountain Jesus was seen to possess all the holiness of God - the Spirit of God
He was to become the spotless sacrifice - by which we could share the purity of God

So Peter goes on calling people to godliness - to pure living - to love filled lives
to claim the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit - which Jesus prayed we should receive

It should constitute our vision - of purity

- the hope of a cleansed nation - through the holy lives of God's people

Eternity

Peter saw Moses and Elijah - representing the Law and the prophets - talking with Jesus

They were at the place where time and space disappear

- they were aware that heaven was all about them

Peter wrote - "we are ever more confident of the message proclaimed by the prophets"

Our need again today - to live in the consciousness of heaven

to absorb the word from God

to be citizens of two worlds

to carry in our persons the glow of the eternal

Divinity

We heard God's voice!

Nothing could take that memory from Peter

The voice was the assurance of Jesus' identity

MY SON -MY OWN DEAR SON !

That was the driving force of their new lives

- the Resurrection was to be the final proof

They had lived and walked and talked with God - the Son of God !!

And they still did !

Forgiveness - healing - new life - a new world - was all theirs
because they were in touch with and possessed by the power of the Universe

That living relationship is still ours today
through the resurrection of Jesus and the gift of his Spirit in us

Climb the Mountain

While they recovered from *the glory*
there was a crowd of people desperately in need waiting along the mountain path
- representing a whole world of people desperate for God
- for truth - for wholeness - for life

The driving force of mission for Peter was not structures (*not building shrines*)
It was the vision of the glory of Christ
which called him to take up the disciple's cross
and follow Jesus through joy and pain and joy, into the most amazing experience of
God's glory shared with God's world

Nothing has changed we have much to learn !

If we are to come through these present, challenging times for Church and Gospel
to discover a totally new experience of Church:
If we are to meet the needs and answers the cries of our world for God

We have to climb this mountain - often!

Year B Lent 1

Mark 1: 9 - 15

Divine Delight

Mark 1. 11 You are my own dear Son- [I am pleased with you] in whom I delight

Delighted!

A beautiful word
- expressing gratitude – embracing joy, excitement, pleasure, wonder, pride

He is My Delight!
describes how the Father feels about Jesus' baptism

This is the *curtain-up* moment after the overture of Jesus incarnation and preparation
Now Jesus is ready to set out on the work of God which is at the centre of all human
history

The divine Son of God – sinless – coming for baptism as a sign of repentance
Sharing our need of baptism– being one of us – truly human!
It marks the beginning of the fulfilment of his purpose of cosmic salvation

No wonder the Father is delighted!
What was planned from before all time is about to take place – with Jesus

Divine delight

I discover here a new way of knowing God
- learning of his capacity for *delight*

It set me thinking of times of God's delight
In the opening scenes of Genesis - the story of creation
God commanded, 'Let there be light' and light appeared. God was pleased with what he saw – he was delighted!

2

The refrain is repeated with each progress of creation
– *God saw that it was good – God delighted in his works.*
when people first learned to harness fire!
when people fell in love!
when warring peoples laid down their arms and declared peace
when people, searching for meaning and purpose to life, went beyond words and definitions and reached out in faith to know God in a profound, personal relationship;
- *falling in love with God!*
God was delighted!

But there was the other side - the times when it all went wrong
When people preferred their own way of sinful disobedience
And the world suffered the agonies of being out of alignment with the Father
- love turned to hate;
- peace clouded by conflict;
- self dominating everything
Surely, God was NOT delighted

And now comes this new and wonderful moment of delight
as God moves to restore the love, the peace, the goodness
– the stage is set
– all is ready
– for the restoration of the world as Jesus comes for baptism.

No wonder heaven thunders with God's voice ...
My Son! My pride! My delight!

Paul grasps something of the wonder of it when writing to Christian in Colossae [1.20]
Through the Son, God decided to bring the whole universe back to himself.

There would be other *delight* moments

When Jesus was transfigured before three of his disciples
This is my own dear Son with whom I am delighted – listen to him.

Before the cross when Jesus was troubled about what lay before him – Father glorify your name - the voice from heaven which the crowd again heard as thunder
– *I have brought glory to my name, and I will do so again.*

Mother Julian of Norwich suggests that God found delight in his Son – even on the Cross as finally he cries out Father! Into your hands! It is finished!.
And what delight there would have been on resurrection morning
and again, at Jesus' ascension - when the work was complete

God who had become man on earth was now man in heaven - one who knows our infirmities and weaknesses – and pleads our cause until all heaven delights in us.

My children! Delighted!

God's delight in his Son does not end there!
The events of Jesus life were just the beginning.

Now everyone who believes in Jesus as Lord and Saviour – and opens their lives to his spirit – his love – to God himself - is a child of God

John 1.12 John, speaking of how the Word – God – all we imagine him to be - became a human being says - all who receive him - by believing - to them he gave the right to become God's children

Jesus explained it to Nicodemus as being a work of the Spirit – like a total re-birth
He gave us three pictures of how God feels when that happens

Pictures of the sheep – the coin – the Son [Luke 15]

- pictures of his delight in us as we become his family.

- *the shepherd with his found sheep*

- *the lady of the house with her recovered coin*

- *and best of all the father with his returned son*

God delights

at every turning back home to him

at every reaching out to him – from experiences of need

at every thought and act of love and kindness

every time we share the aching of his heart for a suffering world

every time we share the gifts of his love – of the Spirit

- sharing in his Kingdom work

Be a divine delight!

The challenge to Christian life and living

To make God proud of us!

To be God's delight!

and so fulfil the purpose of our living!

It is not so much a conscious effort – *What can I do today to make God happy?*

But a relationship of

Sharing life with him

Living close

with one desire that he who is king of kings and Lord of lords,

- the eternal Father, may delight in my life.

At the end of the day – whatever life's achievements – it will be sufficient to hear our Lord say '*well done*'

My child in whom I delight!